

On the Application of

These vague epithets describe nothing, discriminate **nothing**, they express no species, are as applicable to ten thousand things as to this one, and he has before employed them on a numberless diversity of subjects. He has a fretted feeling of this their inefficiency; and can perceive that censure or contempt has the smartest effect, when its expressions have a special cast which fits them more peculiarly to the present subject than to another; and he is therefore secretly dissatisfied in uttering the expressions which say "about it and about it," but do not say the thing itself; which showing his good will betray his deficient power. He wants words and phrases which would make the edge of his clumsy meaning fall just where it ought. Yes, he wants words; for his meaning is sharp, he knows, if only the words would come.

Discriminative censure must be conveyed, either by a marked expression of thought in a sentence, or by an epithet, or other term so specifically appropriate, that the single word is sufficient to fix the condemnation by the men precision with which it describes. But as the censure! perhaps cannot succeed in either of these ways, he is willing to seek some other resource. And he may often find it in cant terms, which have a more spiteful force, and seem to have more particularity of meaning, than plain common words, while yet needing no shrewdness for their application. Each of these is supposed to denominate some one class or character of scorned or reprobated things, but so little defines it, that dull malice may venture to assign to the class anything which it would desire to throw under the odium of the denomination. Such words serve for a mode of collective execution, somewhat like the vessels which, in a season of outrage in a neighbouring country, received a promiscuous crowd of reputed criminals, of unexamined and dubious similarity, and were then sunk in the flood. You cannot wonder that such compendious words of decision, which can give quick vent to crude impatient censure, emit plenty of antipathy in a few syllables, and save the condemner the difficulty of telling exactly what he wants to mean, should have had an extensive circulation.

Puritan was, doubtless, welcomed as a term most luckily invented or revived, when it began to be applied in contempt to a class of men of whom the world was not worthy. Its